

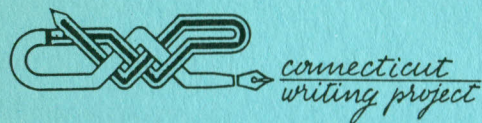
GRACE

UNDER

PRESSURE

CONNECTICUT  
WRITING PROJECT  
SUMMER FELLOWS  
1985





The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of The University of Connecticut, Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely-acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 138 sites in this country and abroad.

In the Project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. Then, during subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further information about the Connecticut Writing Project and its programs, please write or call the director:

Mary T. Mackley  
Director, CWP/Storrs  
The University of Connecticut  
Box U-25A  
Storrs, CT 06268  
(203) 486-2328 or 486-5772  
or  
Faye C. Gage  
Director, CWP/Fairfield County  
The University of Connecticut  
Library Building, Room B20  
Scofieldtown Road  
Stamford, CT 06093  
(203) 968-2213

GRACE

UNDER

PRESSURE

An Anthology  
by  
Connecticut Writing Project  
Summer Fellows  
1985



## CONTENTS

Helen Scinto, COAL.....	1
Gary Richardson, TISSA'S TREE.....	2
Ellie Derwin, THE BALLERINA.....	8
Bill McCarthy, CLOSET.....	9
Vincenza Jane McNulty, CONTAGIOUS CARING.....	15
Jane Teaze, MOTHER, 1908.....	20
Noreen Rogers, TRACES.....	21
Ogden Morse, THE COUNTRY SCHOOL.....	23
Heidi Steinberg, A GIFT FOR A FRIEND.....	26
Susan Garcia, JOAO.....	27
Pat Brown, AUNT MAMIE.....	33
Sydney Adam, ADAM.....	35
Lynda Sorensen, SWEET FANTASY.....	39
Sue Pascucci, THE SPECIAL PLACE.....	40
Libby Rubin, GRANDPAP.....	47



COAL  
Helen Scinto

The heavy sound of the truck stopping in front of the house drew my brother and me to the living room window. Already two men had jumped down from the cab. The driver pulled out a silvery metal chute and headed for the yard. He stepped easily over the small hedge, walked the forty-some feet to the cellar window under the dining room, and fitted the chute into the window frame. His partner walked to the open back of the truck, on which stood, in neat, tight rows, the canvas bags of shiny black coal. He hefted one onto his shoulder and, like a drab Santa, plodded to the chute. Cra-swoosh! The black nuggets slid down the chute into the void. For a second a black dust hovered in the air, while the man trudged back to the truck for the next bag. Cra-swoosh! The driver dumped in a bag. Again and again, robot-like, one coming, one going, the black men emptied the black bags into the hungry hole.

Each cra-swoosh echoed in the house and sent a fine black soot seeping through the wide floor boards and onto sills and table tops.

"Where does it go?" my brother asked.

I knew. The coal would be piling up in the big square bin near the back of the cellar. It was a dark, forbidding corner even without the coal -- beyond the washing machine and set tubs, beyond the big furnace that glowed red when the door was opened.

"Stay away from the cellar," my mother ordered.

Needlessly, needlessly.



TISSA'S TREE  
Gary Richardson

The screen door squawked open and smashed wide against the porch wall. A figure, all arms and legs and flying braids, shot across the porch, down the steps without touching any of them, and was around the corner of the house before the door slammed shut again.

Tissa streaked to the foot of the large maple tree, and with a quick glance around to see that she was unobserved, she hopped up and grasped the lowest branch. From here, by walking her bare feet up the trunk, she would ease herself over the branch and climb up to the crotch of the tree. She disappeared into the curtain of green maple leaves above. The branches here formed a perfect lap to perch in. The lap of the gods, she'd thought when she had discovered the spot a week ago, and she'd come here several times since to revel in her secret place.

Once tucked away here no one could see her, yet she could oversee the house and surrounding yard as well as that of their neighbors as if from a ship's crow's nest. She could be Jim in Treasure Island escaping the dagger of Israel Hand. She was Robin's trusted Alan a Dale waiting to pounce on the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Tissa took the porch pillow she had secreted here yesterday and plumped and worried it until just the right amount of it lay under her seat and just enough lay behind her back to protect her from the ridges of the bark. She sighed contentedly and settled back to survey her domain before opening her book, retrieved from inside her shirt.

"Families, what a pain!"

A week before she'd stormed from the house after a shouting match with Carol, threatening never to return. She'd dashed off down the road to the tree-lined fields beyond the houses and flung herself down, hidden by the tall meadow grass. She had been prepared to suffer her martyrdom alone. Soon, however, her anger had dissipated along with her tears in the warm sunshine, and she had found it much more fascinating to watch a praying mantis performing a balancing act on a bent thistle than to nurse her grudge. Trouble was, when she'd returned home late in the afternoon,

driven by mosquito bites and boredom, the family acted like she'd never left.

"Carol is growing stupider by the day!"

When they were little, Carol was nurse, mini-mother and conscience for her younger sister Tissa.

"She even named me, for crying out loud!" Because she couldn't say sister, it had come out "Tissa" and "Tissa" it stayed. Tissa chortled a little over the number of times she had made Carol's life a trial, leading her into scrapes for which she, Carol, was blamed and little sister escaped scott-free. Trouble was, lately Carol was so busy with her girl friends and all their icky boy talk and secrets and goopy make-up, she couldn't be teased.

"Oh, well, who cares? There were always the 'youngers'."

Mamma had said it must be a trial being in the middle, but it wasn't that bad. As Carol's role as protectress was dwindling, Tissa herself had picked up the "youngers." Little sister Annie and baby brother Chris had grown to become Tissa's loyal camp followers. She had become not only a protectress as Carol had been for her, but authority. Tissa invented the games, ordered activities, and wrote the plays, while they were her eager audience, slaves and supporting cast. It was an ideal arrangement, no matter what Mamma said.

Today, however, the natives had rebelled. Annie and Critter had shut her out of their Candyland game and had told her off amid a good deal of shouting and ill-mannered recrimination on their part. So, with head held high, book stashed, and a hearty, "Who needs you twerps!" she had flounced out of the house, down the porch steps, and up into her hideaway. Now, as the effects of her magnificent exit had begun to wear off, Tissa began to make a closer inspection of her surroundings.

She watched a green inchworm make its horseshoe-gaited way across a leaf. Grandma said if you found an inchworm on you, it meant it was stitching you a new dress. Tissa plucked the inchworm from the leaf -- leaves don't need new clothes -- and put it on her wrist. By the time the little stitcher had reached her elbow, Tissa, bored with the



activity, sent it spinning into space with a flick of her finger.

The smell of summer roses drifted up from the lattice by the cellar door. Tissa could just make out a splash or two of pink through the maple leaf screen shifting in the warm July breeze. A bumble-bee lured by the sweet essence of the roses came hurtling past her perch, unmindful of the human occupant of the tree. A robin cocking his head, listened for his dinner in the Miller's lawn next door, hopped a few feet, listened again, then tugged and tugged to retrieve his fat worm.

Tissa sighed. What a wonderful discovery, this secret spot. If she were careful, she could have this all to herself. No one need know about it. She could slip up here in a brief moment, and the kids would never find her. She could watch the world go by, be the observer and not be observed. What power, what fun! She snuggled back against her pillow once more.

Why shouldn't she have a place all to herself? Mamma and Da had their own room, and when the door was shut, you stayed out. Ma and Da. It sure was good to have two parents. Half the kids in school had splitsville families. Mamma is so active and witty -- like Blanche Ingraham. Tissa looked at the copy of Jane Eyre, unopened in her lap. Not that Ma rode a horse. There weren't too many of those around here, but she was good at tennis. She could be soothing and sympathetic when things really hurt. And Da. What a pal -- noisy and gruff and tossing the littles about when he came home from the station till they squealed with delight. He couldn't toss me around anymore. Tissa stretched out her long legs. At eleven she was taller than many of the boys in her class and could outrun and outswim most of them. Da always chose her to row the boat at the lake on weekends when they drove up for picnics.

He'd tell stories of when he and his Dad went fishing, but mostly they'd just sit in companionable silence while he cast for trout or bass and she trolled for anything that happened along. Mamma organized the picnic and the swimming from the little beach. The Millers from next door came along, and there was much splashing and shouting. Thank goodness, she and Da could be way down the other end of the lake. Those Miller kids were brats. No wonder Mrs. Miller had those awful headaches lately and stayed home. Mamma didn't mind, though. She packed up extra sandwiches and

lemonade. And Mr. Miller was a good sport. He helped with the picnic and stayed to teach the little kids to swim. He's kind of good-looking, thought Tissa, like Mr. Rochester. No wonder Jane Eyre was falling in love. All that sadness and shadow.

Tissa watched through half-closed lids the sun-dappled leaves weave soft ripples of green light. Now she was in the shallows of the lagoon. Mafatu, brave islander, her knife clenched in her teeth, ready to battle the shark. Glancing down, she watched the shark's shaggy black back and wagging tail wander beneath her tree in search of the neighbor's cat. Even Pepper seemed unaware of her presence above. She smiled a satisfied smile and opened her place in the book. But soon even Jane Eyre paled before the novelty of her situation. She stopped reading to concentrate on the tiny spots of light dotting the page. They were thrown by the sunlight shafting through the worm holes in the leaves directly above. Da had said during an eclipse these sun freckles imitated the exact shape of the shadow of the moon on the sun, becoming more and more covered until finally they were all shadow as the eclipse progressed. She must try that during the next eclipse. Tissa yawned. That probably wasn't for years. She turned the page and once more became immersed in her book. Poor Jane. What would become of her?

It must have been a half hour later when Tissa slowly became aware of voices other than Jane and Mr. Rochester. Soft voices, being-quiet-on-purpose voices. A woman's, "Rich, don't. Someone will see us. Let me go!" And a man's, "How can I? Now that we have this, how can I let you go?"

It was Mr. Miller. Why was he home so early? Mrs. Miller and the kids had left for their Grandmother's at the Jersey shore three days ago. She had felt tired again, Mamma said, and thought the change would do them all good. Yet the voices were certainly coming from the Miller back porch, hidden now in shadow. Tissa leaned forward. "Rich, I mean it, not here!" The woman broke from Mr. Miller and from the dark shadow of the awning. Her figure was caught just for a brief second in the bright sunlight before slipping quickly into the house.

Tissa shrank back against the tree trunk and pressed her face into the rough bark until it hurt. She went icy cold in the suddenly suffocating air. The green leaf waves



seemed to crash over her. Her secret world had betrayed her with a secret of its own.

"Mamma," she whispered. "Oh, Mamma -- no."

THE BALLERINA  
Ellie Derwin

The fluidity of her movement on stage brought me back to the present. Her sautes were graceful, always accentuating the suppleness of her slender body. As she completed the final movement of Act I, the curtain closed for intermission.

Walking toward the lobby, my friend Bob spoke to me, his face joyful, his voice enthusiastic. "That last part was magnificent," he said. "Wasn't she just like a deer caressing the forest! She truly is a fine artist."

We continued to walk toward the fountain for some fresh air when the flickering lights reminded us it was already time to return to the auditorium for the second half of the performance.

"Maam, may I see your ticket?" the gentleman at the entrance sternly asked. Muttering to myself as I fumbled through my purse, I finally produced the desired item.

"Open your purse," he demanded as he had done at the beginning of the performance. Once again I could feel the anxiety within me. I quickly opened my evening bag and looked at Bob with now angry eyes as I felt the second intrusion of privacy in the same evening. What was the purpose of the guards checking our purses and then lining the stage before the performance? (Tension was felt throughout the auditorium then and was beginning again.) Did they expect Castro to arrive in a "tutu," his gun in hand, ready to annihilate the ideals of democracy in a moment's notice?

"Well, it's been twenty years since she was here last and from the number of security guarding the Opera House, it will probably be another twenty years before they let her return," Bob said to me as we waited for the curtain to rise.

"Did you ask Ms. Alonso about this when you interviewed her?"

"Yes, I can still see her. I had just asked her why she hadn't performed in the United States in so long. She was getting up from her chair and stiffened as I asked the



question. My heart stopped. She turned in my direction removing her sun glasses. Like a child, I immediately focused on her eyes, only to feel shame for having done so.'

"'Why haven't I performed here for the past twenty years,' you ask. Quite simply, politics, my dear."

CLOSET  
Bill McCarthy

(Playing on the stereobox is Paul Simon's "I am a Rock." Davis is cleaning out a clothes closet in the back of his classroom. He takes out two boxes of books and carries them to another cabinet. There is still a lot of rubble at the bottom, a backpacking boot, a track uniform, a couple of paper balls left over from a classroom free-for-all, a moldy sandwich in a zip-lock bag, a poster of Shakespeare, a brassiere (which he holds up), a few paperbacks, a couple of pencils, gum wrappers, and a condom (which he holds up). He looks amused. He throws all of the junk into a trash can, then gets a screwdriver out of his desk and gets into the closet to fix a shaky shelf overhead. Roberta walks into the classroom. The conversation is awkward, uncomfortable at first.)

Roberta: Here you are. I never know where you're hiding.

Davis: Came in here to grade papers. Too many interruptions in the English Office. As you can see, I've gotten a lot done, but no papers. This closet has seen some action (he holds up the bra and condom).

Roberta: I always suspected you were a closet... ah, lover.

Davis: (He picks up an L-shaped shelf bracket and begins screwing it to brace the shelf.) A lover of closets, that is. You're right. Look at me here, screwing in the closet. That makes you a voyeur.

Roberta: Pretty bad.



Davis: You started it. Anyway, it's almost time I came out of the closet.

Roberta: True. (She changes tone.) I'm sorry I made such a scene. I can't believe I did that. And, you're right. I am a lousy teacher.

Davis: I didn't say that.

Roberta: I know, I know, but that's what it comes down to. And you're right.

Davis: Wait a second. Wait one second.

Roberta: (A little heatedly) No, you wait!  
(Then quietly) Hear me out. Since the first grade, no, kindergarten, nursery school, teachers have been telling me I've got a wonderful personality, bright. One said I reminded her of Liza Minelli, but, in matters of organization, conscientiousness, seeing the whole thing through . . . you know what I mean. I can put on a good show, but.

Davis: But if you . . .

Roberta: Undergo a dramatic personality change, wake up one morning and discover . . . All through school I got by by reading everything the night before, writing the single draft paper on the typewriter. . . I can't do what you do. . . wake up at six, eat breakfast. . . you do eat breakfast every day, right? (He nods.) Teach what you're prepared to teach, thought about, cared about. . . I should be a blues singer.

Davis: You shouldn't give up so easily.

Roberta: Wouldn't you? How long would it take you to see blues singing isn't what you're made for.

Davis: You're quitting?

Roberta: I need the credits. I'll stay. Sounds mercenary, but I need to graduate. I won't inflict myself too badly on your students. I'll do what I can.  
(Kiddingly) I'll even give homework.  
(He smiles.) Also, I want to stay because . . . Hey, you teach film . . . this is the tender scene where . . . you have some other tapes? (Davis nods.) Put on something classical, soft though (he puts on the fourth movement of Beethoven's *Serenade in D Major*). Yeah, that's good. . . Now, we're in this mess together, and I've fucked up, but you're a kind-hearted old man. . . I can't do tears, but I can get my voice to quaver, and since you're the aloof type I make the first move and . . . (her eyes well up with a few tears) there, I've bit the inside of my cheek, and you, sympathetic protective type, put your arm around me in a clumsy, awkward way, and I take advantage of you by first resting my head against your shoulder, and then (kissing him) kissing you full on the lips.

Davis: (He gasps.) Someone might come in.

Roberta: You're right. You are a film teacher. Someone always comes in, in films. We'll get in the closet. Come on (she grabs his tie, hauls him behind her).

Davis: The closet?

Roberta: Sure. We'll add a little farce to the love scene. You don't think anyone will come in there?

Davis: No, but. . .

Roberta: After you. (She opens door, motions for him to go in. She closes the door, they kiss, she aggressively, he timidly and much abashed by her -- a reversal



of old Hollywood films.) You taste good. . . taste well?

Davis: Good. (They kiss again, she initiating, he reciprocating.)

Roberta: Let's stay here all afternoon. You have anything doing?

Davis: Track practice at three. But they'll start without me.

Roberta: Time to slip over to your apartment for something less vertical?

Davis: Never on the first date. What would you think of me?

Roberta: I'd lose all respect. Think you were just another trampy English Department Chairman.

Davis: Sounds good.

Roberta: Well?

Davis: Good. "Good" modifies the implied "it" in the sentence: "It," in brackets, sounds good. Thus, you use the adjective "good," not the adverb "well."

Roberta: Good. Let's go. (The classroom door opens. They freeze.) (Whispered) Who is it?

Davis: Ssh. Can't tell. Custodian? (They hear moaning, kissing.)

Nancy: Oh, Harveykins.

Davis: Did she say Harveykins?

Roberta: That's what I heard. Who is "she"?

Davis: No telling. Not a student. They don't say Harveykins.

Harv: No, not here. Someone might come.

Nancy: I want to come.

Davis: It's Nancy Thistle. (Quizzically) I just dreamed of them.

Nancy: Let's go in the closet. (Davis looks terrified for a moment then tries a variety of faces and positions with which to greet Nancy and Harvey.) (Her voice right outside door) Oh, come on, Harvey. I'm awfully horny today. When you're horny we do it on the grocery line in Stop and Shop. Now it's a different story. (Roberta starts to giggle to herself.)

Harv: Not here. I've been caught in school before and it's rather embarrassing. Let's go to your place.

Nancy: You're getting old and boring, Harvey. How 'bout in the boiler room? I've got a key.

Harv: Why not in Milton's office, for God's sake. You want to get us fired?

Nancy: He'd have forgotten it by tomorrow anyway. All right, my apartment. But not in bed. And no missionary. (Roberta almost hysterical.)

Harv: Fire escape ok?

Nancy: Let's go, Mr. Imagination.

Harv: Ever since I lent you Joy of Sex you've just been impossible. (They leave.)

Davis: (Roberta bursts out in hysterics.) Ssh -- they may come back.

Roberta: That was "awesome." Oh, come on, Harvey. (She looks into Davis's eyes.) I'm awfully horny today.



Davis: All right, my apartment.

Roberta: On the fire escape? We can wave to them as we come.

Davis: I'll go home first. You follow in ten minutes.

Roberta: Too soon. Make it an hour. Or three. You are nervous. Is it your first time?

Davis: When you live in a dorm. . .

Roberta: I'll wrap myself up in a package and send myself UPS. See you in three days. Go, already! Bye-bye, Tommykins. (She gooses him.) Slip into something more comfortable.

CONTAGIOUS CARING  
Vincenza Jane McNulty

"Hello," she said with the warmest smile. "My name is Louise. What's yours?"

"Jane," I said quietly.

"Follow me please."

As I walked slowly behind this nurse my mind began to wander. Why was I so fearful? Anesthesia? That's what worried me. I kept thinking that I had been through it before and each experience was worse than the preceding one. It took me longer and longer to regain consciousness. What would happen this time? Little did I know that today's operation would be one of the most positive experiences I have yet to have, all because of the competent medical staff, especially Louise.

From the moment Peter and I entered the ambulatory surgery center, there was something special and different about this place. The contemporary decor accented in a mauve and pink color scheme was bright and cheery. There were positive vibrations in the air. They seemed to say, "Have no fear. Everything will be okay."

Louise, middle-aged and of average height, led me to the dressing area. Her caring smile and quick and lively gait continued to keep me somewhat at ease. The nursing profession would do well to clone her for the qualities of competence, compassion, congeniality, and professionalism. She is like a butterfly flitting from one flower to the next, taking essential food and carrying away pollen on its feet to spread nature's beauty.

I shed my street clothes and donned surgical garb. Louise conversed pleasantly as she took my vital signs and medical history. Even her uniform was my favorite color, pink. It blended perfectly with her amiable smile and friendly personality.

Louise's keen eye noticed something was the matter with me.

"What's wrong," she asked. "You look a bit pale."



"I'm quite hungry and weak because of the required fast."

"I know just what you mean, Jane. I'm a breakfast person, too. Don't worry, when you wake up and feel like eating, we will feed you well."

I relaxed a little more and thought how fortunate for her patients that Louise knew just the right things to say and her timing was perfect. No wonder her calmness was contagious; her tender touch was so comforting.

Once more Louise observed my anxious face.

"What's on your mind?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm a little nervous as I take so long to wake up."

"When the anesthesiologist talks to you, discuss your fears and your past experiences. He'll know what to do."

That is what I did during the prep interview. Once again some of the tension was relieved.

Finally the moment for my trip to the operating room had arrived. Peter kissed me, telling me he loved me. At Louise's instructions, I put on my "party hat," technically known as a surgical cap. The pat from her caring hand was so reassuring. Because I was so weak and unsteady from lack of food, I was wheeled into the sterile room. The cold temperature made me more uncomfortable.

In a moment I heard my doctor say, "Ready for a short nap?" Then, with a nod, the anesthetic was administered through the intravenous tube in my arm. It quickly took effect. I felt the room begin to spin and I lost control of consciousness.

Vaguely I remember the anesthetist and Louise calling my name in an effort to wake me up. I drifted in and out of consciousness. I was reluctant to try too hard to wake up. It took a lot of effort and strength which I didn't have right now.

When I awoke, still groggy, I was in the recovery area. Everything was fuzzy and hazy. Peter was at my side smiling. Louise and another nurse, Mary Ann, checked my

blood pressure frequently. They had placed oxygen tubes under my nose to help me come to faster. Fortunately, I felt very little pain, only discomfort.

When the nurses were sure my condition was stable they let me rest. I lapsed in and out of wakefulness and talked quietly with my hubby. Periodically Louise would return to check on my progress.

"How are you doing, Jane?"

I was still pretty tired and gave a faint reply, "Okay."

Louise added, "Okay under the circumstances. You're doing just fine."

She had been working since the early morning hours but her mood was cheery and congenial yet very professional.

"Well, you seem to be coming around. Do you think you're strong enough to move to a recliner chair?"

"I guess so."

"I'll help you."

Louise guided me to the next station and offered me some liquid nourishment. The ginger ale tasted so good. I was tempted to guzzle it down but knew that was unwise at this time. Slowly I regained my strength and coherence. Louise returned with a delicious turkey sandwich and oatmeal cookie and more friendly hospitality. Food at last! Louise even inquired if Peter was hungry. She thought of everyone and everything.

"You polished that off pretty well. Would you like another?"

"No, thank you."

"I can tell you enjoy eating. You're looking better."

Now that Louise knew my queasy stomach was somewhat settled, she offered to help me get dressed. We carried out that ritual carefully.

"You'll be going home soon."



Although I was happy that the procedure had gone well and I was on the mend, I knew it would be hard to say good-bye and adequately express our gratitude to the medical personnel for the excellent care I had received. Peter and I were very impressed with the technical expertise, well-groomed efficiency and humaneness of this hospital unit. Hospitals can be good places to be where you meet some of the nicest people. Louise, in particular, is someone unforgettable. Florence Nightengale move over. Louise the lark is here to stay, a credit to nurses everywhere.

MOTHER, 1908  
Jane Teaze

In the family photograph  
outside the Vermont homestead  
you stand, glancing sideways-  
shifted slightly away from the other four  
staring directly at the camera,  
their faces serious and set, arranged in  
still life.  
Scolded for keeping the family waiting,  
a puckery smile keeps you from crying.  
Earlier that morning, you'd been warned to stay  
neat,  
The picture taking was all planned.  
"Sit in the front parlor, Ethel. And stay tidy.  
Don't you skip out down the road."  
But you did, you sidled out across the back  
porch,  
past the pump and down the road to the Higginses.  
Did you want to show them the puffy ribbon tying  
back your smooth-combed auburn hair?  
Twirl around in your plaid dress?  
Did they tell you how pretty you looked,  
all ready for the photographer?  
What with the whirling around, you never heard  
them calling  
from the farm, "Ethell! Where's that  
girl?"  
They waited, picture all composed but you.  
Your grandmother, Mary Jane, in white starched  
blouse with voluminous sleeves,  
stares at the camera, unperturbed by her  
granddaughter's deviation,  
sits in the center on a chair brought from the  
house.  
She's seen many cameras like this one, no doubt,  
has posed with many of her nine children.  
But your mother, also Mary Jane, worn out by  
three, barely avoids a little frown,  
"Where's that Ethel? Why's she not here?"  
Both women wear white blouses, collars shrugging  
up around their chins,  
How hard it must have been to iron all those  
ruffled pleats,  
heavy puffs of cotton, hot, prescribed.  
Women's authority in those white blouses.



Their faces show New England firmness.  
Young Howard stands next to his grandma's chair,  
subdued and proper, dark pants, dark shirt, small  
tie, the comb marks still in his wet  
hair.

And before him, little Hilda, a huge morning-  
glory bow tying up her blonde curls,  
stands perfect,  
waiting, still as her doll in its  
wicker carriage.

Then Ethel races home, they chide her, she slides  
towards the group,  
but not in the group, a bit of distance sets her  
off,

as if they've said, "Now, now, you would go  
running off,  
you stand there, missy, and think  
about it."

I love it that you ran away to play!  
You brought back life into the family pose,  
Your heart pounding, dress billowing out above  
its low-slung belt,  
Whisks of untidy hair escape their clasp,  
stocking twisted,  
a real-life guilty smile --  
More life in you than in their fixed and formal  
faces.

I revel in your disarray!  
This torn and fading photo, vintage memory of a  
younger day.

TRACES  
Noreen Rogers

The dark hallway,  
Like a tunnel,  
Led to the kitchen --  
Big as a bakery,  
Filled with the aromas  
of cinnamon, apples,,  
and memories --  
And your rocker.

You were always  
In the kitchen  
When we came,  
rocking in that chair  
beside the huge, black range --  
And smiling.

I see you now,  
Looking like everybody's  
Image of a grandma --  
a Norman Rockwell subject:  
round, aproned;  
your rimless half-glasses  
resting against  
pink, Santa cheeks --  
And your eyes,  
my father's eyes,  
beautiful, auburn  
deer eyes.

Most of all  
I loved your hair,  
Piled in a spiral-like a bun,  
A soft crown.  
I loved to watch you brush  
The still-chestnut strands,  
long and glossy,  
like a horse's tail.  
Then, head down,  
You'd twist it up  
And fasten it  
with a tortoise shell  
comb.

Your house had a



Wraparound porch  
And stretched  
Front to back,  
A series of  
    single rooms --  
    and that  
    tunnel.

But the house is gone now;  
No trace remains.  
And you're gone, too,  
Grandma...  
    But the traces of you  
    Remain.

I now hold in my hand  
The tortoise shell comb,  
And I look again at  
    your eyes,  
    my father's eyes,  
    my daughter's eyes,  
    now my grandson's eyes --  
Beautiful auburn  
Deer eyes.

## THE COUNTRY SCHOOL Ogden Morse

My father was a teacher who liked to garden. So when he took a new job in 1944, our family moved from Teaneck, New Jersey, to South Hampton, New Hampshire. It was a promising move, promising dogs and cats and open fields, blueberries, hunting and fishing. Not that I didn't like New Jersey. We had close neighbors, parks, and playing fields, railroad tracks, and Queen Anne's Highway, where, it was rumored, little boys who did not look both ways before crossing the street sometimes got run over, although I never saw it happen. But New Hampshire was where my grandparents lived and where we had spent our summers. As I remember, the days were always hot and bright and long, filled with peaches, hay, and mosquitoes.

So there we were, in a small farmhouse, with a mowing machine at the back door and a bathtub on the front lawn. We eventually had the tub installed, but we never did have a shower. And my grandfather built a bedroom for my brother and me right over the kitchen, complete with a secret compartment in the bookcase where we could hide important forgettables.

Then it was September and time for school. Now here was a challenge about which I had been nervous for some time. I had seen Barnard School, a two-story structure with grades one through four downstairs and five through eight upstairs, where I was entering the fifth grade. There was a hard-packed playground and a hand pump out front. And, although I didn't know it then, there was no running water or central heat. Instead, drinking water was supplied by one of the older boys, clearly chosen for physical strength, who carried a bucket from the pump, upstairs to an earthenware jug which he filled. Each room also had a wood stove on which we dried our mittens and mackinaws after playing in the snow. So the afternoons were filled with the odor of wet wool, and, if Howie Whittier had been working in the barn, cows. This latter aroma occurred despite our efforts to keep Howie, a fifth grader whose father owned a dairy farm, from putting his boots too close to the stove.

But more importantly, I had seen some of the other kids. They were big, especially those eighth graders. They were tough, wearing dungarees and flannel shirts even to



school. So it was with some real misgivings that I approached the first day.

My fears increased when my mother dressed the two of us in navy blue shorts, knee socks, and white shirts, traditional attire in New Jersey.

"I don't think this is quite right, Ma."

"Now don't you worry about a thing, boys."

"But, Ma, no one wears clothes like this!"

"You look very nice," said my mother, pushing us into the car. I was dubious. In matters of real importance a mother's eyesight is rarely 20/20.

When we arrived at the school, about thirty children of various ages were milling around the yard. Larry and I tentatively walked forward until we were in the center of the group which gradually formed a ring around us. No one spoke. They just looked. Clearly we had arrived from another planet, and the assimilation process would take some time. Then a teacher appeared on the steps and rang a bell. We formed into lines and marched into the building.

At home the next day the process began all over again. But this time when my mother had left us at school, we knew something had to be done. Not only were our pants too short, but we had forgotten the twenty-five cents necessary to buy Our Weekly Reader. We conferred briefly and then walked three miles to my grandfather's house where we arrived moaning about never returning to school. My grandfather swore and said, "Those boys need some long pants," and we were whisked to Fuller's Men's Store. Larry got brown, and I got blue, and they itched like mad, but our lives acquired a whole new outlook.

And life would have been perfect except that between 8:30 and 3:30 on school days I usually had to go to the bathroom. Since there was no running water, there were two chemical toilets attached to the back of the school. In order to get there, you walked along a latticed passage, the wind and snow blowing through it. And I never intended to make that trip.

One particularly cold day, however, I experienced a crisis that offered no other solution. I crossed my legs,

shifted in my seat, and tried to think of something else. Frankly, I was terrified! But I received the obligatory permission, pulled on my jacket and mittens, and followed my nose to "The Boys' Room." Oh, horror of horrors, it was dark in there. So if I closed the door, I couldn't see. And if I didn't close the door, I could be seen.

The wind blew, the snow hissed, and I had to go something awful. Now a further complication. I couldn't unzip with my mittens on! I took off my mittens and put them beside a hole into which I stared. There, four miles below, was a Stygian blackness so cold and foreboding that my hands trembled. With a sudden twitch, I knocked one of the mittens into that hole. It landed on the oily surface. And then a reaction occurred, so monstrous and frightening that I gasped and shrank back. Fizzing and whizzing and bubbling and whirring that mitten was being consumed before my eyes. I blinked once, and by God, it was gone.

I know the same fate awaited me were I to lose my balance. I grabbed my other mitten and ran, and never once during the next three years did I even contemplating returning.



A GIFT FOR A FRIEND  
Heidi Steinberg

I am looking for you, Donna  
whose gypsy spirit  
I almost lost  
forever...to Distance,  
then to Death.

I am looking for you  
in the wild reeds  
tamed to embrace a circle,  
the straw basket  
you sent from Zaire.

My thoughts creep in and out,  
over and under  
the spiral of straw,  
burrowing down deep  
into the pattern.

I discover our wholeness.  
You return from the jungle,  
fragile and thin.  
I am speechless,  
joyful.

Gently, I hug you to say:  
My life is entwined with yours,  
no matter the distance.  
My soul will know  
when you daydream or sigh.

JOAO  
Susan Garcia

In the heat of the tropical Brazilian sun, the mountainside slum of Vidigal appeared almost deserted. Inside the closely crowded shanties, clumsily built with scavenged remnants from construction sites or from the trash heap at the mountain's base, the slum's inhabitants -- the favelados -- dozed. Only a few restless children and the patrons of Edson's bar stirred.

Joao stood outside the shack of his friend Ze. While waiting for Ze to give the bottle to his baby brother, Joao stared at the nearby mountain of Corcovado with its towering statue of Christ -- the statue's outstretched arms not quite reaching Vidigal. "Is God really a Brazilian?" he wondered. He had heard people say that.

Ze pushed aside the burlap fragment which served as the door to his house and sat down on the cement block step. "Que calor! What heat!" he muttered. He watched Joao quizzically. "What are you looking at?"

"Oh, nothing." Joao paused. "Ze, do you think God's Brazilian?"

"You're loco, Joao, I swear."

Joao suddenly felt childish in front of his older friend. "I was just thinking about what somebody said." Turning to Ze he asked, "Can you leave Paulinho?"

"Yeah, he's asleep now. Let's go!"

As they started down the mountain side to the trash heap, Ze suddenly nudged Joao. "Hey, look who's coming."

Dona Zelia, shapeless in the tent-like dress which hung to her feet, lumbered up the worn pathway. A brood of children, in various stages of dirt cover, noiselessly followed behind.

"Meu Deus, she's ugly!" exclaimed Joao.

"At least your eyesight is working."



"Where does she go every day?"

"To the streets," Ze replied, kicking a broken bottle out of his way.

"To beg?"

"Yeah, to beg."

"She take all those kids?"

"Sure -- that's how she makes people feel sorry for her. She sits on the sidewalk with the baby sucking her tit while the others crowd around her."

"And people give her money?"

"Sometimes. She maks the kids hold out their hands when someone walks by. If they don't, she beats them."

"Why'd she have so many babies?"

"Mamae says that's all she knows how to do."

"Would you ever beg, Ze?"

"I don't know. I guess if I didn't have anything to eat..."

"Well, I never would. I'd rather die first!"

Hunger gnawed at Joao and Ze as they rummaged the trash heap. They had long ago accepted the pangs as a natural part of life and didn't know that the people in the apartments where their mother worked never knew a similar discomfort.

"Hey, Ze," Joao suddenly shouted. "Take a look." He held up an old wheel from a baby carriage.

"Maybe you're not so loco after all," Ze said as he noted the rim which was still perfectly round.

It was a moment of good fortune. Next to soccer, their favorite pastime was taking a stick and seeing who could roll a wheel the greatest distance. Joao had had a wheel like this before, but when one's small in the favela, his

belongings become "community property." He had opted for the pain of giving it up over the pain of trying to keep it.

As if the heat had sidestepped them, the boys ran to the top of the hill eager to start their game. The last time, Ze had beaten Joao six times to two.

"I bet ya can't roll it all the way from the water barrel by my house to Edson's bar!" Joao challenged. Edson's bar, found halfway down the hill, was not much more than a stand which could be closed up whenever Edson chose to do so. Edson ran a numbers game and a few other activities outside the law.

Although he bought his pigna from questionable sources, none refused it because it was cheap and its fire kept dead men alive a little bit longer. The faces leaning against the counter top at Edson's never changed though the bodies did. Both Ze and Joao had been warned by their mothers to stay away from there.

"Who says I can't? I'll bet you anything I've got that I can. What will you give me if I do?"

Joao thought for a moment. He owned nothing. What could he offer Ze?

"I'll carry your water can up the hill," he finally answered. "And if you don't do it, you'll carry mine."

"Now, for sure I'll do it!" Ze countered, feeling the weight of the five gallon tin fashioned from an old cooking oil container.

"Not a chance!" said Joao, hoping he was right. It was long way up the hill from the water pipe, and the heavy can was difficult to balance on his head. Many times he had dropped it and had to return for more water. As the oldest child in his family, Joao at ten had to fetch water for his mother once each day. "Por favor, Pai do Santo," he secretly prayed. "Don't make me carry it twice today."

Ze found a stick and stuck it inside the rim near the top spoke. Slowly he started the wheel on its downward path. He watched carefully for objects and gullies in the road which would cause the wheel to tumble. He ignored Joao's jeers and concentrated on balancing the wheel. Just one house remained for him to pass before reaching his goal.



Joao, running along side, almost forgot he wanted Ze to lose. Neither one had ever rolled the wheel this far before. Ze lifted his eyes a second to see how much further to Edson's. The brief moment of inattention caused him to miss seeing a stone on the path. The wheel hit it and fell.

Ze confidently challenged Joao. "Let's double the bet. If you do it, I'll carry your can for two days, but if you lose..."

Joao had never rolled the wheel further than the past from which Senhor Costello attached the lines for his stolen electricity -- electricity he sold to the few who could pay for it.

"Well, get ready to carry," he snapped.

The boys returned to the open container used to catch rain. Joao splashed some water on his face, sweaty from the hot afternoon sun. He glanced up at Ze and wished he could think of a reason not to do it.

"Come on chicken, let's go!" Ze taunted.

Joao started down the hill more hesitantly than Ze had. The wheel wobbled for a few minutes and then seemed to straighten itself up. It picked up speed. Joao's heart pounded as he passed the post. Carefully he swerved to miss a discarded can in his path. Then he saw the rut. He should have stayed to the left. His grip tightened on the stick. The rut...the wheel leaned slightly..."Please don't fall! Please don't fall!" he begged silently. The wheel continued on. He could hear the cheers of the men drinking cachaca. He passed them. Bringing the wheel to a stop on the other side of the bar, he turned triumphantly to Ze.

"Ah, you were just lucky. I'll beat you tomorrow," Ze said.

"Yeah, only if I show you how," Joao replied. "By the way, you'd better get the water can."

Suddenly Joao noticed his mother coming up the path. "Hey, isn't your mother home early?" asked Ze who also noticed her.

Joao's mother never came home until the dinner had been served and the kitchen cleaned. Something was wrong. Joao ran to find out what, leaving Ze near the bar.

When he reached his mother, Joao could see that she was crying. Her walk was very slow, and for the first time he realized how severely she limped. His eyes fell to her foot grotesquely swollen from an open sore.

"Mamae, what's wrong?" His mother just shook her head.

He took a bag from her and silently walked along side of her. When he passed Ze, neither spoke. Ze just picked up the wheel and walked towards his house.

"Get the baby, Joao," his mother finally said when they reached the door. "Tell Dona Marisa he won't be coming back. Give her this." She handed Joao three crumpled bills.

When Joao returned with Carlinhos, his mother was lying down on the one bed in the room. She didn't even look up at the baby. Joao set him down on the bed beside her and then sat on his mattress on the floor.

"Dona Geri doesn't want me in her house anymore. She's afraid of my foot. She says she doesn't want me to touch anything in her house... Oh, Joao, I never felt so dirty!"

Joao had never met Dona Geri even though his mother had worked for her for three years. She was an estrangeira, and his mother was afraid of the questions she would ask if she saw him, questions her own people never asked. "How old are you? What grade are you in? You're ten and you don't go to school?" It was easier to pretend Joao didn't exist.

"But, Mamae, didn't you tell her your foot will get better? The medicine, Mamae, the medicine the old lady gave you. Didn't you show her?"

"No, Joao. The medicine isn't working."

"Can't you go to the doctor? Ze's mother went when she was sick."

"And pay him with what, meu filho? We don't even have money for milk for Carlinhos when that can is empty." She pointed to the container of Leite Gloria on the shelf.



As his mother's words settled upon him, Joao looked around the one room of his house, at the barrel of water for drinking and cooking, at the stove fueled by kerosene next to the wooden chopping board, at the multi-purpose basin used for rinsing dishes, bathing and carrying clothes to the foot of the hill for laundering at the water pipe. He looked at the shelf which held their supply of food: Carlinho's half-filled can of milk, an open bag of rice, two onions, a container of cooking oil and an assortment of jars and boxes containing beans, manioc, corn meal, flour and a little sugar. A cold fear penetrated the heat.

"Mamae, what will we do?"

His mother rolled over and faced the wall. "Go out on the streets, Joao..."

"You mean like Dona Zelia?"

There was silence. Then softly she answered, "Yes, like Dona Zelia."

#### AUNT MAMIE

Pat Brown

She was "Aunt Mamie" to the rag-tag group of kids on Ludlowe Street. With four children of her own, she found that her corner house became the natural rendezvous for the neighborhood. Beyond the simple fact of logistics, the kids realized that this short, stocky, red-headed Irishwoman was a kindred spirit. Her muscular arms and strong, red, gnarled hands developed by years of housework could hurl a baseball with almost professional grace and speed or gentle down the train of wounded dogs, cats, and even racing pigeons which were brought to her in total confidence that she had the knack. "Don't worry, Aunt Mamie'll fix it." And often she did.

Baseball was the key link. She was mad for it. Often in the dog days of July and August, Edna would walk into the house and find a note on the kitchen table that commanded her to hurriedly eat her supper, grab her mitt, and run down to the empty lot by the dike because her mother was coaching the "South End Royals" again. The best of these times was surely the occasional expeditions to Ebbets Field to root for the Brooklyn Dodgers. What a mad scramble would break out for the precious spots in Uncle Pewees's open touring car. Then Mamie needed all her skill as an engineer to pack supplies and small bodies into every available space. "Cramped? No, there's still space for one more." She had to be a diplomat to comfort those left behind. Like a politician on the campaign trail, she'd call back "Next time" to the hungry-eyed knot of kids who watched the car pull away for the three hour trek down the Post Road to the stadium, her promises came true.

She was coach, counselor, and confessor. Tony Fausci, for example, he could count on Aunt Mamie to stitch up the brown school pants he'd ripped scrambling over the old wooden fence to escape the watchman at the railroad yard. She'd even pry out the splinters embedded in both his palms without making too much fuss. But as she'd work, she'd probe for more than wooden slivers. "Do you realize that you could get badly hurt playing at the yard?" she'd ask. "You're getting too old for such foolishness. Think of how your poor mama would cry if something happened to you, and promise me you'll be more careful."



She loved children. She loved life. The bitterness of losing her husband and four of her eight children didn't destroy her. There was room in her house and in her heart for everyone. In addition to the children, the friends, the baseball team, and the boarders, the house overflowed with pets. In the winter, Spike, Herbie's dog, got to sleep upstairs in the boys' bedroom while the kitchen was taken over by cats, chickens, and even a goat. Nanny lay in front of the huge, black, cast-iron kitchen stove while Biddy nestled down in a box wedged high against the stove pipe. Mike and Ike, "'cause they look alike," had to be content with the scruffy rag rug folded neatly in the space between the back of the stove and the wall.

The baby goat showed up one morning after Peewe had been out all night drinking and playing cards. Pointing to the umbilical cord which was still attached, he proudly boasted that baby goats were deliciously tender. Needless to say, from the moment the kids fed her milk from the baby's bottle, her life was safe. Earlier, in a burst of economy, Mamie had decided that she would raise chickens and thus assure herself of fresh eggs and the occasional chicken for the stew pot. They all died of old age. Biddy, the last hen, moved permanently into the kitchen when the coop became "too lonely."

This gentle woman had tremendous courage. Her first three children died in one night with diphtheria while she was pregnant with her fourth. Overnight, that developing fetus was not to be an only child. Seven years later, death struck again. This time it took her husband and left her a pregnant widow with four other children to raise. During the massive diphtheria epidemic of 1927, her youngest child died.

During the night, anxious to know what was happening to their little sister, Eleanor, the two older children snuck down to watch the doctor. Her faced pressed against the slats of the back staircase which led to the kitchen, Edna watched with uncomprehending horror as the doctor slit Tootsie's throat in a desperate attempt to perform a tracheotomy to save the child's life. She would always remember feeling the pressure of those slats against her cheeks as she watched her mother hold the baby's head down firmly against the table so that she wouldn't move under the doctor's scaple. It was no use. Eleanor died before morning.

ADAM  
Sydney Adam

My bedroom, which I shared with my sister, was quite spacious. The long room and the dining room beneath it formed an ell jutting out from the main part of the house. Three square windows gave us views: east over the terrace, west over the driveway, and south across the valley to the hill beyond which was sharply outlined by a row of cypress trees -- cypress trees drawn in painstaking detail in my blue notebook.

The wide floorboards were bare, and our two simple beds were at the far corners of the bare room. One large closet and shelves were built into the white stucco walls. Guarded by my bed on the left were my shelves. It was there that I stored my notebook on that magic May day.

I remember very little about my sister that year. We shared a room. That was all. Life for me was a series of adventures. The sight and scent of the feathery yellow mimosa in March, biting into a milky fig from our trees, following the orange flame of the kerosene lamp up to bed -- these things enthralled me. If I could have, I would have kept the figs and mimosa on my shelf and a little jar of Grasse smells, but the best I could do was press mimosa in my notebook, and that I did. One can only store durable things. You can't store smells! But you can store stamps, magic stamps from mysterious places, and I did that too. For a short while, anyway.

A blue leather envelope was a special possession of mine. It was the expandable kind with separate pockets on the front. When the flap was lifted, there in gold lettering were the words AMERICAN EXPRESS and under them in smaller print TRAVEL DEPARTMENT. It was lined in blue grosgrain. I doubt that all the silks and spices of the orient could have meant as much to me as did that envelope. Was it the roominess that suggested unending possibilities to me? Or was it the gold lettering? Only a ten-year-old would know. But there is no question that the pockets in the front were perfectly suited for stamps.

The memory of that envelope is clear to me today. And so, unfortunately, is the stamp that found its way into the pocket in front of the American Express envelope.



"Alice lost her stamp! Auntie Dora says that Alice's best stamp is missing." Mother stood in the doorway of my room. Unblinking, she repeated the words, "Alice's stamp is gone!" Her jaw was firm. Her blue eyes burned,

Those eyes! Did people refer to them as sympathetic, loving? The market vendors, the gypsies -- they saw them soft and warm. But those magnetic blue eyes had a considerable repertoire. It wasn't all lullabies. Her family knew that.

"I didn't take it!" I said. But the color was hot in my face, and weakness crawled down my arms and legs. I couldn't run but wanted to. "No, I didn't!" My chin fell to my chest. I just wouldn't look at those eyes. That was the only way.

Mother really didn't need to say a word or make a move with those powerful eyes. They could, at will, be sympathetic and warm or lash out in fury or unadulterated scorn. There was nothing wishy-washy about them. She used her eyes to control all they surveyed, and she usually succeeded.

They could also soothe and caress; I'd seen her eyes do that, though usually to others, that year especially. At times I'd thought that to win that special, rare look, caressing and encouraging, or full of pride and admiration, I would gladly climb Mt. Everest -- alone.

But I couldn't let her know what I'd done. That pretty stamp! I loved its wonderful colors and intricate design. The day before I'd carefully placed it in a small wax paper envelope and slipped it into the side pocket of my blue American Express folder. It fit so nicely! The envelope and its precious contents would be safe on the shelf next to my bed. I could slip the stamp out whenever I wanted.

My cousin Alice didn't need it. For her that stamp was just one of hundreds. And Alice was so cold! How could she feel the beauty of that stamp? She was just a book worm! What did she care about real things? The stamp needed me!

Mother was silent and still as she blocked the doorway. An eternity seemed to pass before I heard, "Peg!" Her voice was low. She was calling my eyes back to hers. Oh, what a naughty child I saw reflected there when I finally raised my

head. Her eyes whipped at my heart and hurt me worse than any hairbrush could.

No, I didn't confess. I was trapped in my lie. I just suffered, sick at what I saw in those blue eyes.

What I did with the stamp I don't remember. (I hope I returned it.) But gone was any joy I might have had with the contents of the little wax paper envelope in my American Express folder. I'd have to find other things to store there. Mother's eyes had seen to that, anyway. They had also seen to my lonely tears.

I guess Mother had reason to be disappointed in me that year. She worried that I was too fat, but more important, she knew I didn't read enough. That was serious.

My sister Elise and Cousin Alice were readers thus easily winning warm admiration from Mother. They were both long-legged, thirteen, and book worms. Being a book worm put one on the highest pedestal and assured one of immediate success in whatever one might undertake all through life. This had been made abundantly clear to me by everyone who should know: Mother, my many aunts, as well as my grandmother.

A letter from my grandmother written that year says, "Your mother tells me that you've finished reading a book! I'm so glad. I hope that the joy of reading is finally clear to you and that you will continue." Well, I must have read something, or pretended I had. Actually what I remember about books that year is the special feel of the paper, smell of the binding, and the fascinating woodcuts in the French history book I was given in school. I remember the maps too. (I did learn the rivers of France.)

Books were important at Tourlaque. Winter evenings after supper Mother would read aloud. It was Bleak House, as I recall. She'd sit in an armchair near the long French window in her room with the heavy book in her lap. Elise and Alice sat on her bed knitting or sewing happily as she read, ohing and ahing, giggling or crying as the story unfolded. When it got dark, Mother would light the kerosene lamp and read on. Interminably, for me. On and on!

No, I wasn't a book worm, and that was bad. Not as bad as stealing, but bad. There were other things about me that I knew were bad too. That time I spent in the closet with



my two boy cousins -- just my age -- I sensed was the worst. It was positively sinful to study the fascinating differences in human bodies as we had.

Poor Mother! It would have been so much better if her youngest child had found adventures in books.

SWEET FANTASY  
Lynda L. Sorensen

I was always shy. Too shy to hit the pinata in first grade and too shy to scramble for the candy that finally fell to the floor. Too shy to ask for an ice cream cone or a flower from my grandfather's garden. My shyness was a thief, snatching away my delights, making my sweet fantasies mere illusions. I moved to the side and looked on at things.

When my mother took me to the shoe store every six months or so, I would gaze at the wooden rocking horse in the back of the store. The selection of shoes became secondary to this magnificent creature, travelling alone in its own separateness, releasing a promise to carry me on its back. Even though it smiled at me with the eyes of a loyal friend, I could not move towards it. Instead, I sat with my shyness and watched other children run towards the rocking horse, sling their leg over the saddle, grip the worn leather strap and secure their feet in the dangling stirrups. I watched them gallop off, the horse's head high, the dense flesh of his belly breathing, air rushing through his nostrils. I sat poised with the shadow of my delight.

Months after my trip to the shoe store my rocking horse reappeared. It was just a matter of waiting...waiting for my father to come home from work, waiting for the sound of the car wheels grinding against the pebbles. When I heard that sound, I would run to the back door and press my forehead against the screen. There would be my father, his lunch pail moving with the rhythm of his long strides.

I stood back for him to enter. As soon as he got through the door, he would bend down to his hands and knees. On all fours he would neigh like a horse, and I would jump on his back, squeezing my knees against his flesh, throwing my arms around his neck, pressing my nose into his wavy hair, the thick mane flying back, sweeping away the darkening afternoon streets.



## THE SPECIAL PLACE

Sue Pascucci

The summer sun beat down. The weeds and wild flowers along the side of the road drooped slightly in the dry heat. Phantom puddles formed in the road, disappearing as quickly as they had come. Jessie shuffled slowly through the sand at the side of the road, smiling ruefully as she plucked some Queen Anne's Lace and rubbed it along the side of her face.

"Benson School Field..." she thought almost out loud. "The field behind the fire house, the one I used to cut through every day in the summer to go to the school playground and play kickball. It was filled with Queen Anne's Lace, and buttercups and those snap things we would shoot at each other."

It seemed as if everything she saw or did or heard nowadays brought back visions of her childhood. After living for her whole life in one small town, her family had moved after she had graduated from high school. She knew no one. A whole summer without a single friend. Her memories kept her company, sometimes overwhelming her with a feeling of loss, sometimes comforting her. She had read more books than she had ever thought possible. She had even started keeping a journal, as though heaven knows nothing exciting was happening to her -- outwardly at least. But the memories of the past, the images of childhood, mingled with her dreams and fears for the future -- her anticipation of entering college in just a few weeks, and filled the pages of an old diary she had found while cleaning out the attic of her old house. She had tucked it away in the box that held her high school year book, scribbled over with friends' promises "never to forget her" and the scrapbook with her Senior Prom invitation and graduation program. The diary had been her grandmother's abandoned attempt at recording her life. It contained a title page: Jessica P. Stone. A Diary of My Life 1927 -- , and one entry and a poem that Jessie had read several times, hoping to learn something about the woman she had been named for. On the rest of the brittle, yellow pages, Jessie had carefully recorded her feelings that lonely summer.

Her favorite place to read and write was a cool secluded spot in the woods about a mile down the road from her house. She had found it one day near the beginning of summer when, out of sheer boredom, she had started taking long walks through the farmlands and woods that reached out around her new home. Her "special place," as she came to call it, was not too far from the road, but it was entirely hidden. Hugh rhododendron and mountain laurel grew thick, preventing the growth of anything except a luscious carpet of moss. Into this green cave of solitude, Jessie would slip away and read and write and dream.

As she sauntered along, her mind, jogged by Queen Anne's Lace and Benson School field, rambled through over childhood memories of hidden forts and secret hide-outs and boys-and-girls and Kool Aid stands. She was startled by a figure that appeared about 50 yards down the road.

"That's funny," she thought. "Why didn't I see him earlier?" Had she been so lost in thought that she had failed to see him approach? Hardly likely. Her heart beat a little faster. He was certainly good looking. Tall -- about 6 feet -- slim but muscular; light brown wavy hair, carelessly combed but cut stylishly nonetheless, and stunning ice blue eyes that sparkled as, approaching closer, he grinned and said, "Hi."

Jess thought, "I think I've died and gone to heaven. All summer long with no one and suddenly this gorgeous hunk is plunked down from nowhere and is standing here close for me to reach out and touch."

"You're new around here," he began. Old words, but what a deep, gentle voice.

"Seductive, that's it," thought Jessie. "Yes, we just moved in down the road." She glanced in the direction of her house to help her affirm that she was not dreaming. As she turned back to him, she startled. He was staring at her -- though her -- the sparkling eyes now cold, piercing, empty -- no full, full of what? anger? hatred? malice?

Jessie gasped. Then, like the sun popping out from behind a thunder cloud, he smiled and his eyes again were bright -- arresting and compelling. "Did I dream that look? What's happening here?"

"You come here often," he said. Was it a statement or



a question?

Jessie searched his face for a hint of that look, but saw only one of the most gorgeous guys she had ever gazed up at. "There's not much else to do around here. This town isn't exactly jumping, especially when you don't know anybody. I just like to get out and walk; it gives me something to do." Jessie held her breath. Had she said too much, sounded too eager? She felt stupid, like a seventh grader babbling to some macho ninth grade crush.

"How right you are," he said. "It is lonely when you don't know anyone and don't know where to go to meet people." Again he smiled.

"God, he's magnificent," Jessie thought.

"I'll just have to show you a few of the hot spots." He looked down at her again, this time holding her with his eyes, knowingly, possessively.

Jessie's head swam. "What's with this guy?" she thought, her breath coming quickly. "I met him five minutes ago and he looks like he's ready to hop into bed with me."

"Yeah, that would be great," Jessie stammered. "Uh, I just remembered, my mom wanted to take me shopping. I've gotta go now. See you around."

He smiled confidently. Jessie turned and walked toward her house. Was he staring at her? With which look? She was burning to turn back and look at him. She felt like an idiot. "What an asshole! Here's this absolutely awesome guy who gives you one look and you run off like a scared puppy dog. He must think you're a class A jerk. Maybe he's still there. I can say I forgot something." Jessie turned her head slightly, not wanting to make it too obvious in case he was still watching her. Nothing. He was gone. For about a mile down the road there was nothing. Just the same old road she had been walking down for the last six weeks, but somehow it looked different now, like your house does when you first walk in after being away for a long time.

"Jesus! Either I'm dreaming or I'm cracking up. I don't believe what just happened to me. This is like something out of a low-budget flick. Or maybe a TV re-run,

'I Dream of Johnny.' If he pops out in front of me again accompanied by a 'ding,' I'll now for sure that I've flipped. Not bad, Jess. You're a real wit." Reassured somewhat by this flippant turn of thought, she walked on home, still puzzled.

"Hi, Hon! You're back early," yelled her Mom from the kitchen.

"Yeah, it's too hot out there. I think I'll just read in my room for a while." Jessie closed the door to her room and plopped onto her bed. Her head still buzzed. Why hadn't she told her Mom? For a mother and teen-age daughter they had a pretty good relationship. Not that she told her everything, of course, but basically Mom was OK, a good friend really, especially this summer when she'd had no one else to talk with. What would her mother say? -- "It's just your imagination. I'm, sure he's a very nice boy? or "Good grief, that must have been scary! Good thing you got away when you did"? Jessie really didn't know, probably because she wasn't sure herself what had happened or why she acted as she did or how she should have acted. Maybe she should tell her Mom after all. No, somehow it seemed her problem. If she had just walked into the kitchen and sat down and started talking, what would have been different. But by coming into her room, she had taken it on herself. She lay on her bed for a long time.

"Jess, can I come in?" her mother called from the other side of the door.

"Yeah, sure. It's not locked."

"You OK, honey?"

"Sure, why?"

"You just look a little pale. Is something bothering you?"

Jess thought, "God, she does have eyes in the back of her head. She used to tell me that when I was little and I believed it because she knew every piece of candy I snatched and every lie I told. How does she do it?"

"No, I'm OK," she said, sitting up on the edge of the bed. "How about that trip into the giant metropolis to see



if the elegant shopping center has gotten in any new fashions since the fifties."

"Sure, let me just take care of one more load of clothes and we can go." Her Mom walked out and Jessie sighed.

The next two weeks were filled with shopping trips.

"Better get the shampoo here on sale. It'll be a lot more expensive at the college bookstore," her mom had said. "You'll have to wait until you get to school till you get your bedspread, but we can get sheets and towels now." And a lamp, and an nice quilt on sale and a few new tapes, and some clothes. Indeed there were a few decent shops in town and Jessie managed to put together a respectable wardrobe. She packed and repacked her trunk. Her bed was covered with clothes. Should she bother with the heavy sweaters now, or wait until the first time she came home?

Her long walks were forgotten, but not the stranger. At odd moments, his face would flash before her, as she was folding a sweater or cooking some bacon for breakfast. Once, when she turned down an aisle in the A&F she swore she saw him, but she couldn't find him even though she had speeded up her cart and looked up and down all the other aisles. Occasionally, she had walked down the road a ways, coming in sight of the place where she had first seen him, but then turning around and heading back. Not that she was afraid, or anything, but she just didn't have time for the leisurely walking and reading she had done before. There was too much to do to get ready.

Two more days before she left. Jessie stood in her room, looking with satisfaction at the packed trunk, bulging duffles, and suitcases.

"Well, I'm ready," she thought, "and with time to spare." She looked at her journal on her desk. "Poor journal. I haven't done much with you lately, have I? Let's go. Once more to the old spot." As she said these words to herself, her heart started to beat faster. "I really am a jerk, afraid of my own shadow."

She walked outside. Fall had crept in overnight and cleared the air and stiffened the weeds along the roadside. The sky was that deep clear blue that makes you feel as if you could reach into forever through it, and the air smelled

cleaned and fresh. "Yeah, just wait till I get to school and then it'll go back up to 90. It happens every year," Jess thought as she walked briskly along the road.

Her eyes darted back and forth, half expecting him to step out from the side. She felt daring, foolish, frightened, and hopeful all at the same time. But he never appeared. She laughed at herself. "This is really stupid." As she came to the place where she turned off to go into her secret place, she looked around one more time. No, she had missed him. She crept into the hideaway, crouched, head down, pushing aside the low-lying branches. One last time in this world of loneliness and then she would be in a whole new world, new friends, new ideas, new places. She pushed aside the last branch and saw him. He was sitting on the moss, smiling at her. Her kneews went soft, her legs folded and she knelt to the ground, her heart pounded in her throat, choking out sound and thought, and her hands tinged as life came back to them.

"Think, think, think," she repeated to herself, almost as an incantation.

"You haven't been here in awhile," he said. Again those eyes. How do you read those eyes?

"No, I've been busy getting ready for college," Jess said, her mind racing. Do I run, scream, talk to him? She could hear her heart pounding in her ears as she tried to clear out her head and think of what to say and do in the awkward silence that followed. Keep things cool, don't show him you're scared. Get him talking, then leave casually. It's OK. You're in control now. Just don't blow it.

"So, what have you been doing with yourself lately," Jess began. Dumb. Stupid. The words echoed in the green cavern.

"Waiting for you." He spoke softly and looked up at her.

"Oh, I've just been so busy buying clothes, packing things. I have three suitcases and two duffle bags and a trunk and God knows how many plastic bags filled with things. I never dreamed how many things you need to go to college." Babblers. Fool. Get hold of yourself. He's just a nice guy who wants to talk to you. Treat him like any other guy.



"I didn't go to college," he said.

"Oh, what do you do?" Jess replied. That's better.  
Good party conversation.

"Nothing."

Suffocating silence. He let the word hang there. Oh  
God. He is crazy. Forget the talk. Just get the hell out  
of here.

Jess's eyes darted about. Please, God, Please. She  
stared horrified as he slowly started to rise. As in a  
nightmare, those nightmares where you're being chased and  
your legs won't move and you scream and nothing comes out  
and you finally get down on all fours, like a hunted animal  
and pull yourself, slowly, painfully, crawl away from  
danger, Jess knelt paralyzed, watching as he rose first to  
one knee, then the other.

Act! Act! Now! She was running; branches slapped at  
her, tore her face, caught her clothes, tripped her. There  
was a sound, outside of her, a wild scream. Her skin  
crawled in anticipation of his touch. In the blankness of  
terror, she heard him, sensed him, knew he was right behind  
her. A few more steps and she would be on the road. Over  
the stream, up the rock, then she tripped and lay sobbing,  
her body tensed, her face buried, waiting for that feared  
touch.

Nothing.

There wasn't a sound other than her diminishing sobs  
and pounding heart. A few tired locusts trilled their  
fading summer song. Slowly, she picked herself up and  
started walking stiffly back to the road, home. She didn't  
even bother looking back. She knew he wouldn't be there.

GRANDPAP  
Libby Rubin

The silent presence;  
The gentle power;  
The memory I let go until yesterday  
When someone walked me back there  
To the house on Cutler Street.

He sits  
In his faded tapestry chair, oversized,  
A huge man with soft white hair I combed,  
Flushed, bouncy cheeks and  
A warm lap.

He, like his majestic fieldstone fireplace,  
oversees the room.  
Soft, blue eyes penetrate  
Clouds of pipe tobacco,  
A pipe that seems a natural sloping of his mouth.

Faded pipe cleaners,  
I twisted to odd shapes,  
Clutter his large, round glass ashtray,  
Leather-bottomed and never clean  
On a table of confusion:  
Crossword puzzles, yellowed letters  
Neatly sliced open,  
An old army knife.

Only the soft, steady rhythm  
Of his mantle clock  
Beats to the silence.

But there was laughter  
Deep from the belly,  
And always songs for me.  
And one day exploring the attic.  
He lumbered up the creaking stairway  
To a place he hadn't been in years.  
Out of breath and slightly bent over,  
He delighted in my discoveries of old doll furniture:  
A small cast iron stove,  
Tiny cups and saucers of chipped china.  
Dusty treasures  
Now somewhere else...